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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Dain Weister  
407-858-1429

**CENTRAL FLORIDA WIC LAUNCHES NEW BENEFITS SYSTEM**

~Electronic system to improve access to healthy food for Florida's children~

**ORLANDO** – The Florida Department of Health in Orange and Seminole Counties is officially launching the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program's electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system today. The WIC offices in these counties join all Central Florida Department of Health offices as a part of the statewide rollout of EBT to better serve Florida's families in need.

"Today's launch is a big achievement for families who are in need of this service," said Dr. Kevin Sherin, director of the Department of Health in Orange County. "WIC EBT makes it easier for families to get nutritious food which in turn leads to healthier outcomes for babies, kids, and moms."

"This WIC transition to an electronic benefits model will be more efficient, cost effective, and reliable," said Dr. Swannie Jett, Health Officer for Department of Health in Seminole County.

The launch is part of a milestone in that Florida was the first state to simultaneously implement a new WIC participant data system and bring EBT services online, accomplishing both projects in less than a year. The transition from paper checks to WIC EBT delivers benefits more efficiently to families as well as Florida's 2,000 WIC authorized grocers. Paper checks will no longer be required and the electronic card will allow for faster checkout times and easier processing of benefits.

With the EBT, Florida's authorized WIC grocers will see a significant reduction in the cost of processing WIC checks. One WIC vendor estimates such savings could reach 90 percent. The new electronic accounts virtually eliminate the need for manual processing and WIC will be able to reimburse the grocer for foods purchased within one business day, significantly reducing the reimbursement time period which also provides a cost savings to the banking industry as well.

WIC is a federally funded program that provides healthy food, as well as breastfeeding education and nutrition counseling to needy families. Florida's WIC Program operates 220 sites throughout the state where families improve their diet and food choices with the assistance of licensed nutritionists and nutrition educators. In Orange County, the average annual value of WIC foods received by WIC clients is \$27.7 million dollars, and in Seminole County, the annual average value of WIC foods received by WIC clients is \$6.1 million dollars.

For more information on WIC services in Orange and Seminole Counties go to, <http://orchd.com/personalHealth/wic/index.asp> or <http://www.floridahealth.gov/chdSeminole/WIC.html>.

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**Florida Department of Health in Orange County**

6101 Lake Ellenor Drive, Orlando, FL 32809  
PHONE: 407-858-1400 • FAX 407-858-5517  
[www.orchd.com](http://www.orchd.com)

**www.FloridaHealth.gov**

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